



ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

Shakespeare was the first philosopher of history. He self-consciously tried to understand the minds of men and women of the most diverse times and places, always with the view to how the permanent problems of human nature are addressed and what are the serious competing visions of the good life. The conflicts of the characters in his plays are always colored by the typical circumstances of their particular place. In commercial Venice, mercenary tolerance permits us to see outsiders in their relation to insiders better than anywhere else. In England, the struggle for legitimate kingship affects the hopes and the actions of many of his most important characters. The student who went to school in Wittenberg brings some of its theological teachings with him in his failed attempt to right the rotten state of Denmark. Shakespeare's utopia elaborated in *The Tempest*, his last play, takes place literally "no place," on an island, that is, on the stage, beyond the specific limits of real regimes. It is always helpful in interpreting Shakespeare to have a map and a chronology at hand. I suspect if anyone were to complete the task of grasping the vast plan of this most comprehensive of artists he would do so only on the basis of seeing his plays in light of time and place. Shakespeare, like a good historian and unlike historicists, needs this knowledge, not to make himself a toady of what is offered to him in the here and now, but precisely to liberate himself from it; he needs to discover the possibilities manifest in other times and places in order to live in the here and now without sacrific-

ing his human potential. This is history as the way to discover the permanent, not to suppress it.

The most important historical distinction for Shakespeare is between ancients and moderns. He shares the Renaissance passion for the rebirth of antiquity and its understanding of Greek and Roman philosophy, politics, and art. What do they say to us moderns, and can we again get inspiration from them? These were questions of burning intensity at the moment when the forgotten beauties of antiquity began to overwhelm the most interesting minds in Italy. It took time for this renaissance to come to England, and Shakespeare was in a position to survey it, think it over, and apply it to his own country as well as to his understanding of man in general. The most important difference between antiquity and modernity is, of course, Christianity. The ancient virtues became in Christianity "splendid vices." The two contrary moralities produced an extreme tension in the spirits of the most interesting men and women of this time and a perhaps productive conflict in the goals of nations. We too can enter into this most interesting of worlds, if we do not assume that these were just passing ideologies of a particular historical moment, but instead see that these are profound and always relevant alternatives that still affect us in various disguising syntheses. The Bible versus Aristotle's *Ethics*, or Plato's *Republic* and Plutarch's heroes versus the prophets and the saints, is a choice that can be as alive to us as it was to Shakespeare. It may be true that Shakespeare presents his Greek and Roman heroes in modern dress on the stage, but they come equipped with ancient souls, which Shakespeare grasped in his profound readings of Plutarch and Homer as well as others. He understood them by imitating them, and in imitating them he allows us to understand them. In them we see the strengths and weaknesses of what is for us the most interesting and decisively different past.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, a story immediately drawn from Plutarch's *Life of Antony*, Shakespeare gives us a very different kind of love from the one we find in *Romeo and Juliet*. In the latter, we have, relatively speaking, a small-town love affair of a pair of callow youngsters. In *Antony and Cleopatra* we have two world-historical figures, mature and far from experiencing their first loves, acting on a stage that was for the time the whole world. It is well for us to remember that prior to the England that was in Shakespeare's time still just aborning, Rome was the most extraordinary political achievement known to man—four

hundred years of republican government, and many hundreds of years afterward of imperial rule, the last reminiscences of which disappeared only a few years ago, when the kaisers and the tsars, that is, the Caesars, were pushed off their thrones. The military virtues of the Romans, unequaled by any other people, enabled them to conquer the known world, and they found the formula to make the conquests stick.

At the moment this play takes place, the republic has been destroyed, as Shakespeare depicted in *Julius Caesar*, and the great political issue is who will be the sole ruler of this empire (an empire that is simply identical to what we mean when we say the West), a struggle that is resolved in the action of the play. The issue of principle, republic versus monarchy, has been finally resolved in *Julius Caesar*. There is no dispute about the best form of government, just the question of which man has the resolve and prudence to become the sole ruler of the earth, the most complete and enticing possible prospect of political ambition, beyond that available to any other historical personages, many of whom may have dreamed it, but none of whom ever came within reach of it. It is important to note that the battle of Actium, Octavius' final victory over Antony, takes place just thirty-one years prior to the birth of Jesus and the new kind of empire connected with him that gradually took over the ground where the old kind of empire was encamped. There are two couples in the play, the enemy couple, Octavius (later Augustus) and Antony, and the loving couple, Cleopatra and Antony. Antony's presence as the common element of the two pairs indicates the high-risk and high-stakes game acted out in this play. Never before or after was love actually put in the balance to be weighed against ecumenical imperium. "Let Rome in Tiber melt" (I.i.33), says Antony at the beginning of the play. This is no idle statement. Rome could be his, and he, for a moment at least, believes that there is no contest, that love is beyond compare more choiceworthy. From the moment the curtain rises the audience must be thrilled by the grandeur of this gesture and all that it entails. The whole world, really the whole world, for a woman. Many men have idly uttered such phrases in their love talk, but no one other than Antony really could prove that he meant it. This play pushes the political and the erotic imaginations to their absolute extremes.

Shakespeare's Antony, as opposed to Plutarch's, cannot help but draw us, at least momentarily, toward a desire to have such a love. Plutarch is not indignant, but rather more contemptuous, while

Shakespeare seduces us. Antony is drinking poison, but oh how good it tastes! *Antony and Cleopatra* contains some of the lushest language in all of Shakespeare. It is less obscene than *Romeo and Juliet*, although it is suffused much more with eroticism. Mercutio's obscenity would not be alien to the classical world, but it is much more ferocious than what one finds in *Antony and Cleopatra* and is perhaps necessitated by the too sweet and secure quality of Romeo's love. Mercutio and Enobarbus are both debunkers, but Enobarbus unabashedly tells us just how really beautiful Cleopatra is (Antony: "Would I had never seen her!" Enobarbus: "O, sir, you had then left unseen a wonderful piece of work, which not to have been blest withal, would have discredited your travel" [I.ii.150–153]), whereas Mercutio does not tell us of any such unique beauty worthy of extreme aspiration. *Antony and Cleopatra* reeks of the Oriental perfumes of the exotic extremes of Rome's empire. This is clearly a Rome that, having swallowed a world of much richer cultural diversity than it could digest, has become, in the technical sense, decadent, with no view of the future and having lost the impulse that made it soar to such heights. This is no longer the Rome we see in *Coriolanus*, where bravery and continence are everything. It is a garden that presents the most lavish display of exotic flowers in full bloom, but where the soil has become thin. There will be no restorative winter followed by a productive spring. This is a play that reminds us of the human beauty of antiquity and makes us regret the loss of it.

To reflect, once again, upon Momigliano's remark, this antiquity has the living presence of the great god Eros without the artificial imitation of it. Rousseau and his Romantic followers tried to reinsert into the unerotic bourgeois world. There was within Christianity a terrible accusation leveled against this dethroned god, but even those like Machiavelli, who tried to restore the unity to man, to close the gap between the ought and the is, were pretty much willing to sacrifice the god rather than to reestablish the sacrifices made to him in antiquity. Machiavelli wrote a marvelous and obscene comedy, *The Mandragola*, which also involves a potion, the plot of which deals with a conspiracy to deceive an impotent old husband and is orchestrated by one who represents the political virtues of captains Machiavelli praises. But this very comedy indicates how unerotic Machiavelli's political vision is, for the erotic theme is meant merely to illustrate a purely political teaching concerning the impotence of Italian politics, the weakness and corruption of priests, and the opportunities existing for potential

rulers who know how to make use of fraud. Obscenity here has nothing to do with the erotic life and merely illustrates political life. When one moves from Machiavelli to his greatest students, Bacon, Spinoza, Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke, one sees that they have drawn the consequences of Machiavelli's teaching. Neither great reputation nor comfortable self-preservation has much to do with eros, and these are the motives that Machiavelli primarily recognizes in man. Shakespeare, as I contend and internal evidence strongly supports, understood Machiavelli very well and profited from that great man's teaching, but as *The Tempest* shows, his wisest ruler used the eros for the beautiful as a fundamental motive for his successors. *Antony and Cleopatra* provides evidence for what caused him not to permit the simplification of man for the sake of political purposes. He obviously wants to promote political efficacy and the love of glory, but, as in so many other things, he is dedicated to the preservation of the phenomenon of man. He looks all over in the best places in order to be able to describe that phenomenon. Antony and his destructive passion for Cleopatra are an important part of that phenomenon. Shakespeare reproduces both an austere concern for politics and a sympathy with eros that only Plato adumbrates in the enigmatic relation between the *Republic* and the *Symposium*, one apparently giving everything to politics and the other apparently giving everything to love.

The backbones of the human soul are understood by Plato to be spiritedness, the passion of the warrior, and eros, the passion of the lover. Antony partakes largely of both passions, two horses as they are depicted in the *Phaedrus*,¹ but they do not seem to work too well in harness. Love is no less ambiguous here than in a Christian context, but it is so in different ways. Mere sensuality, if it were not allowed to get out of hand, would be more benign than love because the issue is not between chastity and sinning but between politics and love. Antony's is the story of the supreme conflict between the two and, with him, the departure of both from the scene of the world for a very long time, perhaps up to Shakespeare's own time. This does not mean that there were no warriors or lovers after Antony, although in Rome itself there was left only bureaucratic regulation rather than ruling, and sexual decadence rather than love. It does mean, however, that in the new dispensation which overtook the world, both warrior and lover became much more problematic, and one rarely saw them in their pure forms any longer, let alone brought together in the soul of a

single man. Shakespeare shows us the end of antiquity in the person of Antony, and he paints a picture, warts and all, that nevertheless is intended to fill us with sympathy, admiration, and perhaps even nostalgia, if this is a sentiment in which Shakespeare indulges himself.



We see the famous couple first through the eyes of Antony's soldier friends. These men are all admirers of Antony, which is one of the main reasons we are disposed in his favor. Strong and frank men admire and love him. They know him best, and you can judge a man by his friends. Their opinion is most certainly that Antony is being destroyed by his affair. His case is treated not as though he is a sinner, but as though a great warrior is losing his martial spirit and has "become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy's lust" (I.i.9–10). This is simply a soldier's judgment of another soldier, not unlike Hector's view of Paris, who leaves the battlefield to return to Helen's bed.² This comparison of Antony to Paris is made by Plutarch himself.³ The difference is, of course, that Antony was, and to some extent still is, unlike Paris, a great warrior. These soldiers, as Enobarbus tells Antony, do not particularly care one way or another about his sexual escapades, but disapprove only when they get in the way of important business. To put it in Aristotelian terms, Antony suffers from immoderation, which is largely to be judged not in itself but in its effect on his capacity to act well. The category is vice, not sin, and it is a vice that can be linked with great generosity of spirit. Love—and Antony is the only man in the play who loves, and Enobarbus the only one who sympathizes with Antony in his passion—seems to be not only sensually satisfying but a sign of genial human traits in those who are its victims. Octavius, *the* opponent, is painted as utterly unerotic. Antony's response to his critics is winning:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space,
Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man; the nobleness of life
Is to do thus: when such a mutual pair,
And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
On pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless. (I.i.33–40)

He invokes a higher perspective in the light of which even Rome appears slight. This is not only the perspective of love; it is also not utterly unlike that of Paul, who looked at Rome in the light of the new faith. This distance on Rome's political achievements—the apparent emptiness of the goal sought with so much patience and so much blood for four hundred years, once it was attained—is something that Antony the lover and the Christians share, and Shakespeare plays on this common ground between the two, although the reasons for the contempt are so very different. This tragedy is redolent with allusions to the secular revolution taking place at the moment when antiquity has reached its peak and modernity is aborning. Soothsayers make predictions of strange new futures, and Charmian hopes to “have a child at fifty, to whom Herod of Jewry may do homage” (I.ii.27–28). The eunuch, one of the stranger products of that East where Cleopatra lives, confesses that he can do only honorable things but has fierce thoughts, and Octavius himself asserts that the day of the olive branch is at hand and that there will be universal peace. Antony is the precursor of the new order as one of love; Octavius is the precursor of it as one of peace. At the climax, soldiers hear trumpets underground and say that they signal the departure of Antony's god, Hercules (IV.iii.15–16). New gods, in no way affectionate toward Antony, will take Hercules' place. Antony's East is where the new religion will come from after he fails, a part of the world full of miraculous possibilities.

Meanwhile, Antony and all his friends are having a wonderful time in Egypt. They drink, they feast, and they make love. It is for them heaven on earth. The picture of the regal Antony and Cleopatra roaming the streets together at night, spying on the pleasures of the common folk, is most enticing. But Antony is clearly a divided man who is uncomfortable in his neglect of his imperial responsibilities. He is not like those later emperors, monstrous men who could devote themselves to monstrous pleasures without too much risk. Antony is not a monster, and he is not yet sole ruler. There is much mopping up to do. He is always on the defensive and has little of the gaiety one finds in Cleopatra or in either of their own entourages. His friend Enobarbus gets a great kick out of Antony's revels, and reproaches him only when he lets a woman get in the way of serious work. Antony seems aware throughout that his involvement with Cleopatra is fatal, but always, as he says, “'T the east my pleasure lies” (II.iii.39). This sense of evasion

of responsibility makes him weak in the face of Octavius. He freely admits his guilt and agrees to change his conduct. He is like an apologetic boy facing a reproving parent. He seems to forget the strength of his position, which Shakespeare insists on. He is the only real fighter and general of the triumvirs, he has loyal troops, and in spite of mistake after mistake, like allowing the younger Pompey to be destroyed, he would still have been able to beat Octavius. But his energy is sapped by his love, as is his self-confidence. Almost everything in Antony's defeat is attributed by Shakespeare to his love for Cleopatra.

Antony is, in both his virtues and his vices, an outsized character. His voracity for all the richest experiences of glory and love is enormous. He was ruthless on his road to power and remains capable of great cruelty. He is avid of his honor but careless of many of the details of ordinary decency. He is typical of the late republic in his political criminality and his personal licentiousness. He behaves like an Olympian god, beyond the limits of the moral virtues. There is hardly a hero more impure for whom Shakespeare gives us any sympathy. Shakespeare depicts him as an extraordinary example of the classical morality of unswerving loyalty to friends and implacable hatred of enemies. Shakespeare's dislike of moralism makes him capable of taking this antique type so seriously.

Antony and Cleopatra are enchanted with each other and unabashedly want to have sexual intercourse with each other as much as possible. The act itself and the way they do it are supposed to be memorials of their sovereign superiority. I believe there is no similar example of a love without marriage sympathetically depicted in Shakespeare's plays. It is a love utterly without modesty. Antony, it must be remembered, is a married man whose wife, Fulvia, is quite a force of nature, constantly starting up civil wars on her own. Antony wants her dead but cannot help admiring her and, at least for a moment, regretting her when she dies. Cleopatra torments him endlessly about Fulvia, and when she hears that Fulvia is dead, responds with the stunning line, "Can Fulvia die?" (I.iii.58). She fiercely demands the whole of Antony, but what the Roman Fulvia represents in Antony's life can never die. The love of Antony and Cleopatra is the perfect example of a love for its own sake, at least on Antony's part, because it can never be good for Antony as anything other than itself, and the possibility of marriage or children is never considered. It is literally lawless but undeniably admirable.

The affair is riven with all the doubts and fears that love between two persons unsupported by convention can have. Both of them have had many loves before. The fact that Antony is married to another is a great subject for Cleopatra's complaints. Cleopatra is not ashamed to advertise that she has made love to two great predecessors of Antony in the power struggles, the elder Pompey and Julius Caesar, and has even borne children to both. Her motives are ambiguous because the queen of Egypt has an interest in flattering the ruler of her Roman conquerors. Antony's deeds prove that in spite of his bad track record for fidelity, only Cleopatra involves him now. Eros has rendered him to her completely. He might, from pure self-interest or his sense of responsibility, want to break with her, but he is unable to do so, however great his motives. Still, though one can always retain some doubts about Cleopatra, the overwhelming impression is that she too is in the grip of uncontrollable passion. There is none of the simple assurance and candor of a Juliet in her. Innocence is too far behind her for her to trust in the preservation of attractions. She torments Antony endlessly and artfully in order to keep him on edge. It is not quite the game of *amour-propre*, but she makes him always worry about the significance of her moods. If he is gay she will be sad, and if he is sad she will be gay (I.iii.1-12). This is not the confident and giving love so much admired in modernity. It is utterly selfish, and perhaps reveals more accurately the true nature of love as desperate need of one for the other. The tyrannical character of the total demands made by each are proof of the terrible bonds that tie them to each other. To my mind, Cleopatra's complaint to the dying Antony, "Hast thou no care of me?" (IV.xv.60), is a more powerful statement of love than are selfless expressions of sorrow or regret. Each is directed to the other by ineluctable need. Their admiration for each other means that they must possess each other no matter what the consequences. It is a hunger and a possessiveness more powerful than any other. Few men or women are capable of such selfish self-forgetting.

Cleopatra gives ample testimony to Antony's qualities by her dispositions when he is not there and her plotting to increase her ascendancy over him. She is a consummate actress in manipulating him and constantly and guiltlessly exploits his attachments to his wife and to Rome in order to make him prove that they are nothing to him and sacrifice them in her all-consuming fire. There is no prudent balancing of considerations possible with her. She asks for everything and makes it

clear that it is a stark choice between her and everything else. He must break with Fulvia in order to prove his thralldom to her, and yet when he wishes to break with Fulvia, that proves he is a man of no faith. Cleopatra's servant cautions her that she is overdoing it, but she responds, probably correctly, that she knows how to catch and hold on to her prey. There is such a mixture of artfulness and artlessness in Cleopatra that it is difficult to choose between the interpretation that she is madly in love with Antony and the alternative interpretation that she simply enjoys her empire over this emperor. I believe that the evidence inclines toward the first of these two, but the doubt is important for Antony and for us. In general, he seems to be sure of her and, at the moments when he thinks of his duties, wishes to liberate himself in the way an opium smoker might wish to free himself from his habit. She is an Oriental goddess who ensnares her votaries. She is active only in converting those votaries, especially those who are rulers of Rome, to her cult. They are attracted by her beauty and the pleasures it promises. The relationship is akin to that between human and god, but this cult is a cult of beauty. In this sense, she is like the old gods.

Her widely alternating moods have a genuineness that astounds. She is what would today be called a real or strong personality. Only a dry or utterly unerotic man, like Octavius, would fail to have at least a fugitive attraction to her, if only to crush it for the sake of more urgent considerations. Perhaps the only time she is unappealing is when she insists on participating in the Battle of Actium and then runs away, and even then . . . Earlier when she has most vexed Antony, who must leave for Rome, she comes to herself, recognizes the necessity, and says, "Courteous lord, one word: / Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it: / Sir, you and I have lov'd, but there's not it; / That you know well, something it is I would,— / O, my oblivion is a very Antony, / And I am all forgotten" (I.iii.86–91). For men and women in love, every parting is a little tragedy reminding them of death, of the final inconceivable separation of those whose bodies and souls are entwined in such a way as to produce the illusion that they are inseparable. When she is alone, she glories in his memory and can think only of his virtues, virtues exceeding those of Pompey and Caesar, whom she loved in her "salad days, / When I was green in judgment, cold in blood" (I.v.73–74). Her beating of the messenger, who brings the news of Antony's marriage to Octavia, a classic example of the misplaced blame that stems from anger, suits her regal superiority to rea-

son and further illustrates her resemblance to the old gods. In spite of the messenger's reminder that "I that do bring the news made not the match," and Charmian's saying that the man is innocent, Cleopatra asserts that "Some innocents 'scape not the thunderbolt" (II.v.67, 77). According to Hobbes, the old gods were admired not for their justice but for their power, and Cleopatra's behavior confirms this observation.⁴

She frequently uses an unadorned erotic language that seems to need no veil of mystery to be enticing. "O happy horse to bear the weight of Antony!" (I.v.21). "Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears, / That long time have been barren" (II.v.24–25). And, in a complaint that hints at what it is that makes Antony different from Cleopatra and makes her impotent to overcome the difference, "I would I had thy inches, thou shouldst know / There were a heart in Egypt" (I.iii.40–41). Heart and organ would necessarily for her express the same thing. Her sexual allusions are not like those of the serving people in *Romeo and Juliet*, filthy thoughts that have no relation to reality, nor are they like Mercutio's demystifying jabs. They are the full expression of her mode of being at its highest. She is eroticism itself. What an interest in and taste for women Shakespeare had, giving us Juliet and Miranda at one end of the spectrum and Cleopatra at the other, with an astonishing variety in between! The Romantic imagination looks very thin when compared with this.

Unlike *Romeo and Juliet*, where the beauty of the principals is attested to only by them, *Antony and Cleopatra* has the blunt truth-teller Enobarbus, who is the very model of *bon sens*, tell Agrippa and us, in some of the most gorgeous poetry written in any language, of how Cleopatra "purs'd up his heart upon the river of Cydnus" (II.ii.186–187). This is an eyewitness account intended to buttress or give authority to the rumor of Cleopatra's being "a most triumphant lady" (II.ii.184). Enobarbus immortalizes the first meeting of Antony and Cleopatra when she arrives on the famous barge. Shakespeare proleptically follows Lessing's rules about the limitation of poetry in representing bodily beauty. Lessing teaches that painting cannot adequately imitate Homer's description of Helen's beauty as seen through the eyes of men who are old and have suffered because of her but who are nevertheless aroused by her. Lessing asserts that a painting which imitates this famous scene in the *Iliad* could show only superannuated lechers looking at a veiled woman. The great ancient artists illustrated

this scene by making a statue of the most beautiful naked woman their art was capable of. This was the visual equivalent of the poetry. The sculptor cannot reproduce the actions but must present the essence of what the poet is saying, the impression of surpassing beauty. Similarly, the poet cannot stop his narrative, which is essentially in movement, to give off a list of the various parts of Helen's body, which can in no sense rival the immediate perception of the whole form. This would require a cold act of addition on the part of the reader, which is alien to the immediacy of the experience of actually seeing a surpassingly beautiful woman. The poet must put the experience that he wishes to convey into actions, effects on others, and so on, if, in this case, he wants to rival the sculptor.⁵ Enobarbus describes the arrival of the barge and the stunning effect of its movement:

the oars were silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
The water which they beat to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes. (II.ii. 194–197)

And then we impatiently await description of Cleopatra herself, but are both delighted and frustrated by:

For her own person,
It beggar'd all description: she did lie
In her pavilion—cloth of gold, of tissue—
O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature. (II.ii. 197–201)

Shakespeare refuses the temptation to do what his art cannot do well and instead reminds us of a picture, here asking us to think of any picture of a beautiful woman or goddess that we may have seen.

This last quotation contains one of Shakespeare's most interesting reflections on the relation of art to nature, the kind of reflection too many modern critics do not permit him because they think he was not as sophisticated as they are in the understanding of what art is. It is accompanied by a similar reflection put in Cleopatra's mouth:

But if there be, or ever were one such,
It's past the size of dreaming: nature wants stuff

To vie strange forms with fancy, yet to imagine
An Antony were nature's piece, 'gainst fancy,
Condemning shadows quite. (V.ii.96–100)

This is Cleopatra's testimony in favor of Antony to balance Enobarbus' testimony in favor of her. In both cases, nature begins by being considered as low stuff upon which the artistic imagination improves. The artist presents us with a perfection that we ordinary people never encounter in life, although it follows a path indicated by our desires, fed with experiences of nature. Our longing for perfection would appear to depend on artists for its satisfaction. But there is a peripety: these human beings, Antony and Cleopatra, who are not gods, outdo anything art could hope to do. We are prepared, and our desires are sharpened by the artist's superiority to nature in its crude form, to see nature as perfection, which art then imitates. The artist is with respect to nature both humble and sublime. I wonder if this view is that much less satisfying than that of nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists who are so proud of their superiority to nature and the power of their art. These reflections on nature are most suitable to a tragedy that seems to be meant to remind us of nature.

Nature is still the theme as Enobarbus continues:

 and Antony,
Enthron'd i' the market-place, did sit alone,
Whistling to the air; which, but for vacancy,
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
And made a gap in nature. (II.ii.214–218)

Nature itself goes to accompany Cleopatra, and the passage concludes with words of almost unbearable longing:

MAECENAS: Now Antony must leave her utterly.

ENOBARBUS: Never; he will not:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry,
Where most she satisfies. For vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her, when she is riggish. (II.ii.233–240)

I do not say that Shakespeare means Cleopatra to represent nature itself, but there is something here of the ancient appreciation of nature as the almost ineffable standard by which all that time and custom can do is measured. There is nothing in this view of nature to remind us of the abstract, teleological nature that pedants speak of, a nature enveloped in a cobweb of moralistic abstractions that strangle it. It is the wondrous foundation that provides us with those fundamental experiences that are truly ends in themselves and which are almost always forgotten in the lives of toiling mortals. Even the priests themselves must abandon their moralisms to conform to her infinite variety. It is this awareness of nature that I believe accounts for the extraordinary beauty of this play, which stands out among so many other beautiful plays. This tragedy bemoans the perhaps irreparable loss of such a nature, nature expressing itself not as the mountains, the seas, and the forests, but as the microcosm, man. Antony is—as Shakespeare, over against Plutarch, underlines—the man *par excellence* who is open to such an experience. It destroys him, and his capacity to appreciate it is accompanied by important moral vices in him. But Octavius, whose world it is about to become, is utterly blind to this vista. This makes him a perfect administrator. If one wants a model, better expressed than Weber ever could, of what is wrong with bureaucracy, this is it. The erotic passions in Antony are the source of his capacity to apprehend a human satisfaction manifestly greater than that of being the world's sole ruler.



And here we must return to the harsh but exhilarating facts of politics, which this play so starkly contrasts with those of love. In order to emphasize the radicalness of Antony's choice, Shakespeare heightens Antony's responsibility for everything that goes wrong. On the evidence of the play, Antony was a sure winner if he applied himself to the political situation. His position is so strong that even after mistake after mistake, he was in a position to recoup himself. But his judgment and his resolve are so compromised by his love affair that we see only the ashes of a man who once had superb military and political gifts.

When we see him together with Octavius upon his return to Rome, he has that peculiar flaccidness we have already mentioned, apparently stemming from the sense that he has behaved dishonorably. The

soothsayer speaks of Octavius' preeminence over Antony. He always beats him, even at games of chance (II.iii.10–30). Antony does not wish to confront Octavius directly, although one might judge that the sooner-or-later should be faced sooner. It is perfectly clear that we find ourselves here in a situation beyond law or simple morality. These two powerful Romans stand in a gap between regimes; the old republican laws and structures have been laid waste and the world is waiting for one of these two men to establish the empire and its new kind of legitimacy. In the absence of law, only prudence governs the situation. This is one of those extreme moments that, according to Machiavelli, teach us the true nature of politics, which does not reveal itself in the times when traditional legitimacy covers over such extremes. Treaties are made and broken here according to their momentary utility. Neither Octavius nor Antony ever gainsays that the triumvirate cannot last and that one of them will inevitably win. Three is the number of peace, two is the number of strife. It will end with the two and then the one. If the three partners were of equal power, then the overwhelming ambition of one could be checked by the self-defense of the other two. But Lepidus is the third, and he is not a real third. Lepidus is only a name without power, treated with contempt by his partners, and easily crushed when Octavius makes his move. The difference between Octavius and Antony is that the former is perfectly unified and dedicated in his pursuit of the goal, while the latter dreams that politics will take care of itself while he devotes himself to his pleasures. His dealings with Octavius are interruptions, whereas Octavius' dealings with him are the continuation of a single-minded and long-range plan. The special character of the situation is that the qualities of manliness, which were so important to Rome in its rise, are no longer necessary. Everyone, including Octavius, gives testimony to Antony's preeminence as a soldier. Julius Caesar's strengths are divided between the two rivals—Antony has the soldier's prowess and Octavius has the prudence.

If Antony found that this moment was not the time to make war on Octavius, at least he should never have strengthened the stronger. This is Machiavelli's cardinal rule, and the one most likely to be broken by the weak-willed. Above all, the younger Pompey, who was a real threat to Octavius, should not have been destroyed. Octavius needed Antony in his struggle against Pompey, whereas Pompey was not yet a threat to Antony's eastern hegemony. Politics is normally a continu-

ous struggle with one danger succeeding another, requiring perpetual vigilance. The Roman Empire was approaching an end of politics as all enemies were destroyed. Strangely, Antony wants politics to be over right away so that he can enjoy the fruits of centuries of struggle, whereas Octavius waits in order to establish his secure hold on the empire without any such gratification as Antony enjoys, unless one can count being treated as a god as such a gratification. Both live with the prospect of a wholly new situation in which politics disappears. Antony is simply not up to living with the threat posed by Pompey, even though it is probably a political necessity.

Antony agrees readily to the destruction of Pompey, wanting only to discharge a debt of honor and then to proceed dishonorably. He then agrees to marry Octavius' sister in order to insure the uninsurable permanence of their relationship. Octavius uses his sister with perfect cynicism and shows off the unerotic political usages of marriage, while Antony hastily agrees to the union in order to put off till tomorrow what he should be facing today. Enobarbus, as in all things, sees clearly from the outset that rather than binding the two together, this marriage will separate Octavius and Antony more radically than ever. Antony will abandon Octavia, and Octavius will be able to use this pretext for his war on Antony.



In one of the truly perfect scenes in which this play abounds, we see Pompey rejecting the empire of the world on moral grounds when it is offered to him by Menas. The triumvirs have foolishly put themselves at the mercy of Pompey by accepting the invitation to be entertained on one of his ships. This is really an illustration of what Machiavelli means by fortune, that is, putting oneself in the hands of another when one ought to keep one's own hands on that other. But perhaps it wasn't all that foolish because they could count on Pompey's morality. He is the only conventionally pious man in this play, obedient to and fearful of the gods. He is also the only one who justifies his own action in terms of republican legitimacy, calling to mind Cassius and Brutus, who fought against one-man rule. None of this has much relevance in the situation Pompey actually faces, and he himself is confused as to whether he is merely vindicating his father, or restoring the republic, or going for one-man rule himself. When Menas tempts him, proposing that they weigh anchor and slaughter the triumvirs, Pompey responds,

Ah, this thou shouldst have done,
And not have spoke on't! In me 'tis villainy,
In thee, 't had been good service. Thou must know,
'Tis not my profit that does lead mine honour;
Mine honour, it. Repent that e'er thy tongue
Hath so betray'd thine act. Being done unknown,
I should have found it afterwards well done,
But must condemn it now. Desist, and drink. (II.vii.72–79)

This calls to mind a similar passage where Henry IV needs and wishes Richard II dead but cannot bear the responsibility of ordering it himself.⁶ This is the extreme situation in which the conflict between politics and morality becomes acute, and the whole quest for justice, which should be the goal for both political and moral men, becomes questionable. This conflict can disenchant idealists and open up the field where Antonys play, indifferent to the quest for justice. I think it is clear that Shakespeare believes that Pompey makes a mistake. Though he wishes to profit from unbidden dishonorable deeds of others, Pompey holds that honor has an absolute status, a position justified only if there are gods who reward and punish. There may be a certain nobility in his stance, but if nobility has to be separated from intelligence, and depend on the spontaneous service of the ignoble, it is a pretty lame thing. Antony's heroic nobility is treated much more sympathetically by Shakespeare than is Pompey's moralistic nobility. History hardly remembers the strangled Pompey, and there is not the slightest indication that the gods took on his case. His fame in the world would have been splendid if he had performed the daring deed, and he could have worried about his reputation for justice when he was the sole ruler. He was in the jungle or the state of nature, kill or be killed. He was a pretty good lion but a complete failure as a fox. Fraud was beneath him, and he became its victim. Certainly the nobility and choiceworthiness of the political vocation become doubtful in this perspective. Shakespeare learned very much from Machiavelli's teachings about politics, but unlike Machiavelli, when the splendor of politics is suppressed he could not take politics fully seriously. This may have been the point at which he parted company with Machiavelli and became sympathetic with Antony's eroticism, which links Antony to the poet. When being a Roman was no longer an honorable qualification, the nobility of being the ruling god of the world vanished.

Just after this capital scene, which illuminates the nature of politics, there is another one that is a footnote to this one (III.i). Ventidius, Antony's subordinate, has subdued the Parthians, that previously unsubdued people on the borders of the empire who were a real and immediate threat to Antony's part of it. When Silius suggests to Ventidius that he pursue his advantage over the Parthians, Ventidius responds that it is not a good idea for a subordinate to outshine his master. The master would likely be jealous of the light that puts the master in the shadows. It is dangerous for the subordinate, who then is willing to sacrifice his master's true good for the sake of his own preservation. Envy and jealousy are ugly passions that appear in politics and undermine common goods and loyalty. Moreover, this scene raises the question about the glory attaching to great captains, for it is frequently borrowed from the deeds of subordinates. This may very well tempt the subordinates to overthrow the captains or to serve them ill. Such things were controlled and channeled when there was a functioning republic. But in the naked individualism of anarchy, they make us doubt the possibility of genuine attachments in politics.



The peak political moment in *Antony and Cleopatra* is, of course, the Battle of Actium (III.vii.7–10), where Octavius definitively becomes Caesar, his adoptive father's name, which supersedes "king" as the title of monarchs. His victory is utterly Antony's fault. Cleopatra wants to go to war; Enobarbus opposes it as vigorously as he can; and Antony takes it for granted that his female partner should go to war with him. Enobarbus, and everyone else, wants to fight on land, where Antony's superiority lies. Cleopatra wants to fight at sea, and again Antony, without question, simply follows her. The sea seems to be the element of fortune, and the land that of virtue, military virtue. It was on Pompey's ship that the three pillars of the world lent themselves for a moment to fortune. Now Antony risks himself on the sea and loses everything. He belonged to that tradition of Spartan and Roman land fighters who went to war on foot and who the ancient thinkers believed were the most reliable foundations of stable republics. In Athens, the move from land forces to sea forces during the Persian wars introduced the tumultuous democracy. In Shakespeare's time, following Machiavelli, there was an attempt to reintroduce an art of warfare that could rival the ancients. The lack of the

ground soldiers who faced the enemy hand to hand was symbolic of the weakness of soul in modern man since the decline of Rome, with its bodily and spiritual arms. Antony had an "absolute" superiority on land, but this captain put a female captain over him. Yet he could have won, had not Cleopatra panicked and run away with her ships. And here is the core of it all. Plutarch quotes someone who said that the soul of a lover lives in the body of another, and in the same context he compares Antony's conduct to that of the recalcitrant black horse in the soul described by Socrates in the *Phaedrus*.⁷ No doubt Antony is in love. From the point of view of sound reason, Antony is wholly to blame. When Cleopatra asks Enobarbus whether she or Antony is at fault for the defeat and the death of both now in prospect, Enobarbus answers, "Antony only, that would make his will / Lord of his reason" (III.xiii.3-4).

Enobarbus is a marvelous fiction of Shakespeare. He is made out of whole cloth, the only character who bulks much larger in Shakespeare's play than he does in Plutarch's *Life of Antony*, where he is mentioned in passing, without any characterization. Shakespeare makes him epitomize the friends of Antony, to whom one could speak so directly, thus proving Antony's capacity for friendship, for leaping over the barriers of inequality that make friendship so rare a thing for political rulers. Octavius appears to have advisors, perhaps flatterers, but no friends. Julius Caesar tried, but obviously failed, to keep his old republican equals, like Brutus, on a footing of equality when he topped them all. But Antony, as he could love, also could be a friend, and perhaps this is another aspect of his unworthiness to be king. Enobarbus represents that classical view of reason as the governor of the passions rather than their handmaiden. The contemporary parody of reason as mere calculation is a consequence of this later view of reason. The ancient view meant that the passions, none of them evil in themselves, are to be ruled and used for the sake of the good and the noble. This implied a reflection on the good and the noble that is something other than mere calculation.

At the risk of superficial schematization, I would say that the classical view was succeeded by a Christian one which believed that the passions are both irresistibly powerful and hopelessly corrupt and that reason is too weak and too deceptive an instrument to master them. They can be held in check only by fear, sense of sin, conscience, and guilt. The early moderns accepted the primacy of the passions but

tried to cleanse them of guilt and gave reason, in a new function as scout or spy of the passions, an honorable place in the scheme of things. But reason, the prudent ruler of the divinatory but disorderly passions as the object of meditation, was never restored. The crisis of ruling in the soul and its incapacity to function without consent of the passions is paralleled by a similar crisis in politics. Shakespeare, here represented by Enobarbus, never, even when he is making love appear most enticing, ever takes the side of passion against reason, as would a Romantic. The reasonable people in Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (unlike Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*) are only contemptible bourgeois.⁸ With Shakespeare, the old dignity of reason as a perfection of man is present, and the momentary passions of a Julien Sorel and Mme. de Rênal would never be considered by him to be a self-sufficient fulfillment. We would need much reflection on the ancient view of reason in order to make its claims plausible, but those claims peep out in Shakespeare's plays, which deal with the extreme passions of acting men and women. Enobarbus admires Antony. He treats his debauches as the proper amusements of a warrior and can share at the deepest level, as we have just seen, his erotic attractions. But he is contemptuous of the unreason of Antony, and becomes its severest critic when Antony's love destroys his empire and his friends:

I see men's judgments are
 A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward
 Do draw the inward quality after them,

 Caesar, thou hast subdued
 His judgment too.

 A diminution in our captain's brain
 Restores his heart; when valour preys on reason,
 It eats the sword it fights with: I will seek
 Some way to leave him. (III.xiii.31–33, 36–37, 198–201)

The conflict between loyalty and reason becomes the source of Enobarbus' personal tragedy, but he is the voice of reason in this play. The difficulty is connected with Shakespeare's obvious sympathy with Antony's erotic passion.

In order to think well about this we should have to understand Plato's *Phaedrus*, where Socrates takes a firm stand on behalf of eros and its immoderation against the moderate, and at least apparently rational, calculations of a nonlover or a lover who wishes to appear to be a nonlover in quest of sexual gratification without madness. The praise of madness can be understood only to the extent that reason itself must be informed by an apprehension of the beautiful or the good in order to be truly what it is. In his most explicit passages about philosophy, Socrates treats it as an erotic activity, nay, *the* erotic activity. Such an understanding of reason and philosophy is entirely absent from all modern thought. That famous black horse is a recalcitrant but essential part of the upward motion of the soul's chariot. Something like this seems to be at the root of the reasonable Shakespeare's sympathy with Antony's erotic mania and his nostalgic backward look at an experience that had disappeared from the world. Antony is ruler, as were many great Romans, and lover, as were few or none. He could not harness the two, and both went down together with him.



Enobarbus chronicles Antony's fall in the name of reason, but he does something else very important in addition. In a play where the actors reflect on their historic roles and their places in posterity, Enobarbus acts as Antony's witness. In this he is entirely unlike those witnesses who were just about to appear on the eastern edge of Antony's empire. He gives testimony to the hero Antony was, a testimony that makes Antony survive the disaster of his cause. After the defeat at Actium, Antony's deterioration poses an insoluble problem for Enobarbus. Enobarbus' asides are continuous hints to us about Shakespeare's intentions:

Mine honesty, and I, begin to square.
The loyalty well held to fools does make
Our faith mere folly: yet he that can endure
To follow with allegiance a fall'n lord,
Does conquer him that did his master conquer,
And earns a place i' the story. (III.xiii.41-46)

Telling a story, a sort of alternative Gospel, about the old lost world is of imperative importance for Enobarbus. The suicide of a Cato in

the name of the republic, an intransigent refusal to accept the wave of the future, was easy compared with what Enobarbus faced. For Cato, the principle was unquestionable, whereas Enobarbus had to memorialize the example of a kind of man, not as such connected to a principle, decaying before his eyes. He proves unequal to the task, but in doing so, succeeds at it. He defects to Caesar. And Caesar is not just the man Caesar. He is a whole new world containing new kinds of aspiration or perfection. Enobarbus quickly recognizes that this is not a world in which he can comfortably live, that there is no place for him in it. With one of those extraordinary gestures of antique generosity, Antony sends after him to Caesar's camp all of the treasure Enobarbus has left behind, together with some of his own and gentle adieus. Enobarbus is finished. The old world is no longer viable; the new one is unbearable. And he goes to find some ditch to die in. "I am alone the villain of the earth . . ." (IV.vi.30–39). Enobarbus makes Antony the cynosure of posterity's eyes.



The transformation of Octavius into Caesar Augustus, who ruled for so long and became a god more securely than did Julius Caesar, the first Roman man to become a god, is chronicled in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The status of god is attained when companions and followers turn into worshipers, when authority is unchallenged. This is godship seen from the point of view of the votaries. From the point of view of the one who becomes a god it is unrivaled and unquestioned authority and the power to live as one pleases. No man can challenge such a god. He represents a conclusion of the dialectic of master and slave with the establishment of a universal master. All fear him, and all esteem him. There is no longer a Coriolanus looking for an Aufidius to challenge him. There are no Aufidiuses left. Octavius is an unprepossessing candidate for the godhead. Without having had to perform Julius Caesar's deeds, he picks up his legacy. In *Julius Caesar*, one sees how Caesar found his worshipers. They were the Roman plebs for whom he provided bread and circuses and who had no greatness of soul with which to challenge him. He was their benefactor, and the great-souled aristocrats were annihilated. There remained millions of slaves and one master, whose protection was sought by all. Octavius simply had, in an efficient and single-minded way, to confirm the result that Caesar's genius had prepared. Manliness, the very meaning

of the Latin word "virtue," was, at the beginning of this play, on the point of vanishing. The Roman Empire became peopled by a race of, as Gibbon said, pygmies.⁹ In this vast space, another new God was soon to establish His authority, taking the place of the many old gods, the departure of one of which we see in this play, the manliest of them all (IV.iii. 15–16). The new religion was to be eagerly embraced by the new breed of Romans. Cleopatra, while preparing her escape from Caesar's realm, for a moment acts the part of one of his worshipers. She calls him the sole ruler of the world, confesses her sexual sins, and recognizes his right to all of her property. His will is the only law. He describes the vista he overlooks when he says, "The time of universal peace is near: / Prove this a prosperous day, the three-nook'd world / Shall bear the olive freely" (IV.vi.5–7).

Octavius is the spirit of history. Throughout the play, Octavius is characterized as lacking any charm whatsoever. He is calculating, self-righteous, hypocritical, merely manipulative in his expressed indignation at the treatment of his beloved sister, unbelievable in the tribute he pays to his fallen opponents, whom he praises only for the sake of building himself up, unerotic, and a party pooper. He is by no means an evil man in Shakespeare's gallery of villains. He is merely the victor who proves the kind of mediocrity men are willing to worship when it succeeds. There is no possible earthly escape from his new modes and orders. However, in Enobarbus, Antony, Cleopatra, and Shakespeare, he ran into nonhistoricists who did not throw in their lots with the providential march of history. He is very eager to prove to the world that he acted justly. From the outset, his concern, in addition to defeating Antony, is to put him in the wrong and show that in spite of Caesar's forbearance, Antony, and anyone else who opposes him, is in the wrong. He takes people to his tent to show them what he has written to and about the other principals and his struggles with them (V.i.71–77). So much depends upon telling his story and giving the color of justice to his victorious enterprise. Enobarbus, Antony, and Cleopatra each want to tell the story of their side without any hope of its victory, intransigently insisting on the superiority of the failed cause. The rest of the play is devoted to the heroes' response to Octavius' ascendancy. Act IV is devoted to Antony's exile and suicide, Act V to Cleopatra's agony and suicide. Suicide is a great theme in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. One must remember that suicide is a sin in Christianity, and that in Shakespeare's time this was still

taken very seriously. The Christian interdiction of suicide could be understood as an attempt to make it impossible to escape God's justice. But there is not a trace of disapproval of these deeds in Shakespeare's presentation of them, and, upon reflection, one can only come to the conclusion that Antony and Cleopatra did the right thing. Suicide was very much a Roman deed, not in the modern style of "the right to death" for people whose bodies no longer work. Nor is it quite like the antibourgeois display of willingness to die, a kind of negative demonstration that one has the wherewithal to be dedicated to a cause even if one doesn't have a cause. These Romans die for country, for liberty, and for honor, not for showing that they could die. Shakespeare's characters all lived in a world, as Churchill described it, where "All had to be endured, and hence—strangely enough—all might be inflicted."¹⁰ There are, of course, cowards in Shakespeare, but most are men who are willing and expect to fight and know that death is always a possibility in a fight. None of them quite likes to die, but they have a certain resignation in the face of the risk of death. Only in the bourgeois world does the risk of death take on an almost erotic attractiveness and become a kind of game to prove that one is not a bourgeois, the typical inhabitant of a world where the right to life is the premise of human action. There is no such right in Shakespeare. Suicide is the proof not of willingness to die but rather of a man's love of freedom, the unwillingness to bend the knee to a tyrant. The suicides in this play are committed not in the name of republican liberty, but in the name of personal freedom from the Caesarean machine. Cleopatra says, "and then, what's brave, what's noble, / Let's do it after the high Roman fashion, / And make death proud to take us" (IV.xv.86–88).

No doubt, this kind of suicide is problematic, especially as it shows concern for the opinions of others. Even in their suicides Antony and Cleopatra are engaged in a struggle with Octavius, who wants to use them as part of his victory. At the very least, they elude him by not permitting him to dispose of their fates as he wishes. Cleopatra will not be marched through Rome in a triumph, the symbol for the mob of the ridiculousness of opposing Caesar. This indicates that the intention of these suicides is not only to frustrate Caesar, but to affect the opinion of the mob.* The contempt for the opinions of the many is part of

* What historicists call History is for Shakespeare only a meaningless succession of mob opinions. When one understands such opinions in this way, concern for them is less justified. No one would want to miss out on the revelation and progress of the Truth. Such a view of things unbends the will to resist in the name of personal conviction.

Greek and Roman aristocratic taste, but classical aristocrats do worry about the opinions of their equals. They may even have to worry about their appearance among the mob, since only through mobs will one's memory be preserved for the special few in after times, as Cato became a model for those who wanted to found republics again, millennia after he committed suicide. Something like this surely preoccupies Cleopatra, if not Antony.

This concern for the honors accorded by others, honors that the proud man thinks he deserves whether others actually accord them or not, is a kind of Achilles' heel in the political man's makeup. Officially, at least, Socrates would be absolutely indifferent to what people think of him because he enjoys pleasures that in no way depend upon honor and because his pleasures are incomprehensible to all those who cannot partake of them. Antony shows some awareness of a possibility of such a life that is both fulfilling and outside of the system of honor when he asks Caesar for permission to live as a private man in Athens, that gentle middle ground between Rome and Alexandria. Caesar, of course, will not permit this. Antony's great love is itself a strange mixture of the private independence of two individuals who live for each other and the public life of the ruler. He partakes of a kind of simulacrum of the Socratic experience but without its self-sufficiency, at least on this earth. And it is not to be forgotten that Socrates himself committed a kind of suicide with the intention of gaining a good reputation for himself or for philosophy.

Still, Antony and Cleopatra are splendid suicides. The agonies of these two heroes, which take up an unusually large part of the play, the crucial action having taken place in the middle of Act III, are not at all typical of Shakespeare's plays. There is suffering, sorrow, and regret here, but the abiding impression is more that of an apotheosis. This is not the end of a Macbeth or an Othello, who see that they have done terrible wrongs and have destroyed the meanings of their lives. Both Antony and Cleopatra are glad that they did what they did, and the humiliation of their defeat is counterbalanced by the assertion of the rightness of their love.

Antony has two moments of anger at Cleopatra, although he has many moments of self-deprecation about the conduct that brought him to Caesar's feet and betrayed his very loyal followers. His angers are both occasioned by the defection of Cleopatra's ships and the consequences of those defections. It would not be correct to say that he is jealous of Cleopatra, but he opines that she has played him false with

Caesar, turning his love into a foolish infatuation, unworthy of the supreme sacrifices made for the sake of it. After Actium, he finds Cleopatra apparently compacting with Caesar's ambassador. She has a record of coming to terms with rival Romans who get to the top. Her capricious behavior, "her infinite variety," makes her difficult to decipher. The defections that end the second battle persuade Antony that she has "pack'd cards with Caesar" (IV.xiv.19). But in both instances Antony is easily assuaged. Immediately after Actium, Cleopatra's tears, so much ridiculed by Enobarbus, draw forth the response:

Fall not a tear, I say, one of them rates
All that is won and lost: give me a kiss,
Even this repays me. (III.xi.69–71)

Antony's requests for kisses are not to be compared to Charles Bovary's, although both are made at moments of defeat.

The reversal of his fortunes unhinges Antony, and he becomes extremely erratic. His worst moment is when he challenges Caesar to a single fight, rebelling against the unfairness of a poor fighter's winning out over a good one. Caesar answers simply, "let the old ruffian know, / I have many other ways to die" (IV.i.4–5). He also induces his followers to cry for him, of which he is immediately ashamed. But underneath it all there is this continuous stream of erotic feeling for Cleopatra. Even his great speech comparing himself to the illusions projected by the clouds, insubstantial things that quickly dissipate, ends in their mutual expectation of embraces in heaven. At the very end, he says,

I am dying, Egypt, dying; only
I here importune death awhile, until
Of many thousand kisses, the poor last
I lay upon thy lips. (IV.xv.18–21)

Antony is easily persuaded by Cleopatra's mere speech that she did not betray him at Actium. He has really tragic suffering just after the second battle and the desolation induced by his belief in Cleopatra's dishonesty. He cries out that he is suffering, as did his ancestor hero and god, Hercules, in the shirt of Nessus. His contemplated suicide is at this moment simply the end of everything. But he is mollified when he hears that Cleopatra has preceded him. He then thinks only of join-

ing her. The fact that this is just one of her tricks and that she is still very much alive may cast some light on the genuineness of love, but certainly Antony, even provoked to the limit, always gently returns to his dedication to this woman. And he is vindicated by her extraordinary behavior in the scenes after he dies. They are joined to each other forever. It is one of those marvelous historical accidents that Antony had a servant named Eros, and throughout Act IV his calls for the help of his servant, Eros, Eros, stud his speeches. "Eros!—I come, my queen!—Eros!" (IV.xiv.50) is typical of these passages. Antony wants Eros to kill him, but Eros commits suicide himself, thus depriving Antony of a death administered by Eros. He must do it himself, and he half botches the job, which allows him to spend a delicious last moment with his beloved. The richness of the allusions contained in this, the death of Eros, needs no commentary.

Antony's struggles and his farewell to this world concern fortune and Caesar. In a sort of Stoic reflection on fortune, he recognizes that human autonomy requires independence from the turns of its wheel. Caesar's happiness depends not upon Caesar but on fortune, and Caesar can tomorrow become a slave. This is Brutus-like, and a certain aping of wisdom. Anyone devoted to politics depends on fortune. Antony's attachment to eros surely reduces that dependency, but this is all part of the incoherence that brings him down. He reiterates the importance of suicide—"a Roman, by a Roman / Valiantly vanquish'd" (IV.xv.57–58)—as part of his independence of Caesar. This is a noble stance, but it rings somewhat hollow. However, Antony, a much less moral man than Brutus, is actually more independent of the political wheel of fortune than is Brutus, and this is undoubtedly due to his love. Brutus dies for an utterly lost cause, whereas Antony has at least for a moment participated in beauties that never change, and in the end dies because of and for them.

Actually, Caesar does not care about bringing Antony back to Rome to decorate his triumph. He simply wants him dead. "We could not stall together, / In the whole world" (V.i.39–40). But Antony does believe that his story will be different from Caesar's. Caesar's world depends on capturing everything that would oppose it. Actually, Antony's story, as something independent of Caesar's and choice-worthy for its own sake, depends on Shakespeare.

Shakespeare makes Cleopatra into Antony's historian as she struggles to come to terms with her loss:

It were for me
 To throw my sceptre at the injurious gods,
 To tell them that this world did equal theirs,
 Till they had stol'n our jewel. (IV.xv.75–78)

They have had heaven on earth, but the jealous gods have deprived her of her earthly god. But by the end of Act V, she has “immortal longings,” and goes to meet her husband in heaven. She is upset that Iras precedes her, for fear that she take the kiss from Antony that was destined for her. The mortality of love between two human lovers is not acceptable to her. She and Antony join in the divine union after death that is required by their love. They both long for immortality, as eros always prompts man to do according to Socrates, but they are able to seek for it only in mortal individuals. From their experience with each other, they divine the divine, but do not grasp it. They are right in thinking that it is eros in man that leads toward the divine and that, unlike many other visions of the divine, it must begin in the divine form of man. Cleopatra's descriptions of Antony, from the moment of his death to her own, are overpowering. His last words to her were intended to justify her love of him. She never needed to justify herself to him because she was the lovable in itself. Her praise of Antony is only heightened by the fact that it is interspersed with flattery of the new god of the earth, Caesar. One is thus forced to compare him with Antony, the god of her soul. Their movement to heaven does not quite persuade us, but we cannot help wishing them well. This is another kind of divinity produced in decadent Rome.

And, finally, again the question of who is to enjoy that famous triumph. All of Antony and Cleopatra's worshipers have converted to Caesar, who says that the converts alone would be enough with which to defeat Antony. With the exception of the regretful Enobarbus, these conversions are painted as low things, the generality of mankind's worship of vulgar success. Cleopatra's passion not to be incorporated in that success, not to be one of those defeated without dignity by the new order of things, is overwhelming:

CLEOPATRA: Now, Iras, what think'st thou?

Thou, an Egyptian puppet shall be shown
 In Rome as well as I: mechanic slaves
 With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers shall

Uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths,
Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
And forc'd to drink their vapour.

IRAS: The gods forbid!

CLEOPATRA: Nay, 'tis most certain, Iras: saucy lictors
Will catch at us like strumpets, and scald rhymers
Ballad us out o' tune. The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexandrian revels: Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I' the posture of a whore. (V.ii.206–220)

Caesar is indeed robbed and disappointed when Cleopatra escapes him. He puts the best face on it when he says, “and their story is / No less in pity than his glory which / Brought them to be lamented” (V.ii.359–361). They are now objects of pity, brought to that condition by Caesar, whose glory, Caesar insists, is enhanced by his having done so. But what Cleopatra most feared does not come. In this play, she is “boyed” (the most improbable role for any of the boys who played women in Shakespeare’s plays), but not as a whore. It is only in Caesar’s tradition that a Cleopatra would be indistinguishable from a whore. Shakespeare picks up the cause of Antony and Cleopatra, and by his poetry perhaps leads us to the truest meaning of eros. Generation after generation they are renascent on a stage on this earth, and thus Shakespeare pricks our heart with longing, not for a lost world, but for something that is always accessible to man as man. This is really a triumph.